

DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
BRIEFING PAPER

EXCISE

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Foreign Policy Constraints Inherent in Long Foreign  
Military Sales Lead Times

This paper raises a serious problem in our military supply relationships with key friends. The answer lies within the Defense Department and the Congress but the failure to deal with it adequately over the years causes us to put it on the agenda for consideration by the new Administration.

Heightened tensions in the NEA area since the collapse of the Shah and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan have increased regional uncertainty over the ability of the various countries to defend themselves. These concerns have been manifested clearly in the sharp increase in demands for additional military hardware in terms of both quantity and technical sophistication. The problem is our present inability to respond promptly.

Several concrete examples in the recent past bear repeating as examples of how long lead times seriously damage the credibility of our military assistance programs. Perhaps the most troublesome example is Egypt. Despite our best efforts to accelerate some symbolic deliveries of equipment (F-4 fighters, armored personnel carriers and TOW anti-tank missiles) and to educate the Egyptians concerning the protracted nature of our procurement cycles, their expectations have far exceeded the realities.

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The recent cautious renewal of our military supply relationship with India appears to have foundered on the self-same issue: protracted deliveries. Building on a generalized Indian desire to diversify sources of supply and reduce its dependence upon the Soviet Union, a number of pro-West senior military officials pushed hard for procurement of the TOW anti-tank missile, lightweight 155mm howitzers and, presumably other equipment to follow. Letters of offer for the first two systems were at the point of signing when it became clear that it would be almost three years before the Indian Army would have all the equipment necessary to field even the first tactical unit using either one. We have not been able to improve substantially upon this estimate.

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While it is clear that the answer to the problem lies less with the State Department than with DOD and, more particularly, with the Congress, it is equally clear that we need to take a hand in the solution of the problem since its impact falls so largely in the foreign policy area.

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What is needed is some sort of anticipatory production capability providing flexibility of response to fast-breaking crises when they happen. The law prohibits--as well it should--drawdowns on U.S. military stocks where the impact would be inimical to our own defense posture, making resort to our active inventories largely a non-responsive solution. The answer lies, perhaps, in the sort of "overstocking" we are urging upon Persian Gulf oil producers as a foundation for surging forces into the areas in an emergency.

The alternative, of course, of overstocking the U.S. military would cost a great deal more money. However, it would serve also as a strategic reserve and may in fact be better suited to today's concepts of quick, sharp wars. Integration of ready reserve would of course be much faster to the extent equipment was in stock and not over the horizon by several years.

In summary, we are losing a measurable degree of impact in our arms transfers overseas due to the protracted lag between agreement and deliveries. The Soviets, seemingly, do not suffer--at least acutely--from this disability. Creative thinking is needed to rectify the imbalance, and we cannot do so using existing U.S. military inventories as the source of supply.

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